TAXIS AND TOADSTOOLS

RACHEL FIELD

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Taxis and toadstools

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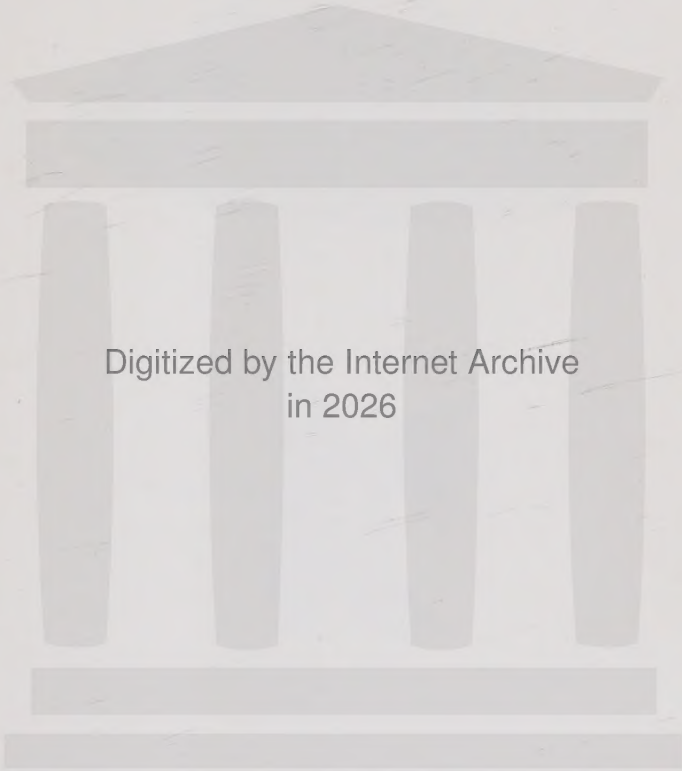
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TAKING ROOT

TAXIS AND TOADSTOOLS

Verses and Decorations

by

RACHEL FIELD

DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC.
GARDEN CITY NEW YORK

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TAXIS AND TOADSTOOLS

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Books by Rachel Field

* * *

AN ALPHABET BOOK
THE POINTED PEOPLE
SIX PLAYS
ELIZA AND THE ELVES
TAXIS AND TOADSTOOLS

FOR
AN AUNT AND TWO COUSINS
K. C. A.
G. C. V. N.
E. C.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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PEOPLE

THE FLOWER-CART MAN

When it's just past April
And going on May,
The bent old Flower Man
Comes our way.

His clothes are very baggy,
His horse is lean and gray,
But, like a walking garden,
His cart with plants is gay.

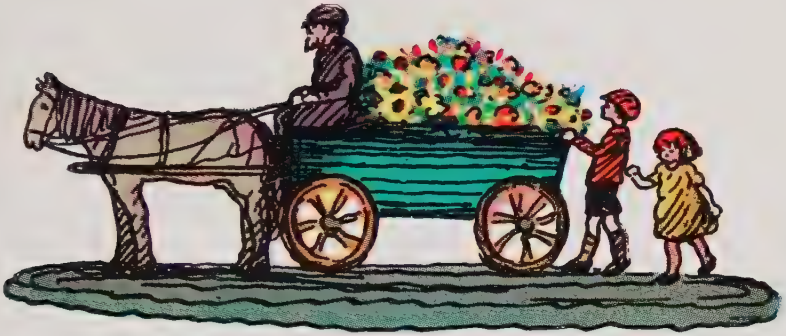
All filled with nodding rose trees
To make your parlor bright,
With tulips for your table,
Or daisies gold and white.

With pansy plants and lilies,
Primrose and daffodil,
And red geraniums in pots
To trim your window sill.

Everywhere his cart goes
  The air smells sweet,
As the gray horse and he
  Jog from street to street.

They say that Spring's a lady
  And it may be so,
Though she never stopped on our street
  As far as I know—

But the bent old Flower Man
  Comes our way,
When it's just past April
  And going on May.



SANDWICH MEN

THERE's something about Sandwich Men
That makes me want to cry;—
Not just because they're mostly old
And dreary round the eye,
Or stooped between those painted boards
Their shoulders carry high,
It's something that you seem to feel
When Sandwich Men go by.

You always know that they are there
No matter how you try
To turn your head the other way;
It's not because they sigh
Or beg. They haven't things to sell
And so you cannot buy.
You have to watch them shuffle past
In rainy streets or dry,
And feel that something that you feel
When Sandwich Men go by.

THE ICE-CREAM MAN

When summer's in the city,
And brick's a blaze of heat,
The Ice-Cream Man with his little cart
Goes trundling down the street.

Beneath his round umbrella,
Oh, what a joyful sight,
To see him fill the cones with mounds
Of cooling brown or white:

Vanilla, chocolate, strawberry,
Or chilly things to drink
From bottles full of frosty-fizz,
Green, orange, white, or pink.

His cart might be a flower bed
Of roses and sweet peas,
The way the children cluster round
As thick as honeybees.

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THE BLIND MAN

The Blind Man on our corner
  Is sitting in the sun.
He carries pencils in a tray
  And always holds out one;
He cannot tell the blue from brown,
  The yellow from the red,
But he looks as if he kept a lot
  Of secrets in his head—
For he smiles at something all to himself.

He keeps his money in a cup
  To make a pleasant noise,
And he likes to pass the time of day
  With little girls and boys,
But mostly he sits listening,
  With his cup and pencil tray,
To all the different kinds of steps
  That hurry by each day—
And he smiles at something all to himself.

GYPSY CHILDREN

Gypsy children go bare of foot,
And bare each shaggy head,
The cloth of their coats is patched and torn
But its color is royal red.

Roadside berries and nuts their fare.
Soup by a faggot fire,
But they sup to a gypsy fiddler's tune
A king might never hire.

No beds of feathers or down for them,
But the whole of earth's broad floor;
Trees for neighbors; stars for lamps—
What child could be wanting more?

FRECKLES

JANE's hair is gold as a daffodil.
Blue as the sea are the eyes of Will.
Nan's lips are redder than any rose—
But Dick has freckles on his nose,
Almost as many I should say
As there are stars on the milky way!

SUMMER AFTERNOON

"Little Anne! Little Anne!
Where are you going,
With your sunbonnet on and your basket new?"
"Up where the berries hang round and blue,
That's the place I'm going to!"

"Little Ned! Little Ned!
Where are you going?
Where are you going so fast away?"
"Off to the fields where they're making hay,
That's where I'm going so fast away!"

"Little Joan! Little Joan!
Where are you going
On your two brown feet, where will you go?"
"How can I tell what I don't know?
I let my feet say where I'll go!"

AUNT EMMELINE

She's aunt to nearly half the town;
It keeps her busy making brown
And crusty doughnuts—cookies too.
She never says how many you
May safely eat; they're on the shelf,
You simply go and help yourself!
Her kitchen's warm with baking pies,
Her pantry sweet with jam and spice,
And she herself is plump and wise
With kindliness behind her eyes
And wrinkles all about. I go
To see her every day or so.

SANDY SAWYER

Strawberries grow for Sandy Sawyer
When other people's plants have none;
His peas are greener and more tender,
And his potatoes, every one,
Have such a smiling sort of look
As if it pleased them all to be
In Sandy's patch of garden ground
Between the pasture and the sea.
Even the trees in his orchard bend
With twists and knots in every limb,
As if they tried with might and main
To make themselves look just like him.

THE PRETZEL MAN

The Pretzel Man has a little stand
With spikes like the fingers on a hand,
And everyone strung up and down
With rings all baked to crispy brown.
The very richest queens and kings
Could never wear so many rings;
Though theirs be made of brightest gold
Set thick with jewels ages old—
Still, Pretzel Men can *eat* their rings
And this is not the case with kings'!

TAXIS AND THOROUGHFARES

GOOD GREEN BUS

Rumbling and rattly good green Bus
Where are you going to carry us?
Up the shiny lengths of Avenue
Where lights keep company two by two;
Where windows glitter with things to buy,
And churches hold their steeples high.
Round the Circle and past the Park,
Still and shadowy, dim and dark,
Over the asphalt and into the Drive—
Isn't it fun to be alive?
Look to the left and the River's there
With ships and whistles and freshened air;
To the right—more windows, row on row,
And every one like a picture show,
Or little stages where people play
At being themselves by night and day,
And never guess that they have us
For audience in the good green Bus!

PATCHIN PLACE

In Patchin Place, in Patchin Place,
There's a lamp-post tall and thin,
And the Jefferson Market clock's round face
Is always peering in
Over the chimneys clustered thick
And the spindly trees that grow
By the worn old stones and weathered brick
Of the houses in a row.

In Patchin Place the rooms are small,
The stairs are long and steep,
The nearby buildings tower tall,
But it's there that I would sleep—
With the old street lamp for company
With the clock's round shiny face
Watching the whole night long to see
All's well in Patchin Place.

TAXIS

Ho, FOR taxis green or blue,
  Hi, for taxis red,
They roll along the Avenue
  Like spools of colored thread!

Jack-o'-Lantern yellow,
Orange as the moon,
Greener than the greenest grass
Ever grew in June.
Gayly striped or checked in squares,
Wheels that twinkle bright,
Don't you think that taxis make
A very pleasant sight?
Taxis shiny in the rain,
Scudding through the snow,
Taxis flashing back the sun
Waiting in a row.

Ho, for taxis red and green,
  Hi, for taxis blue,
I wouldn't be a private car
  In sober black, would you?

CITY RAIN

Rain in the city!
I love to see it fall
Slantwise where the buildings crowd
Red brick and all.
Streets of shiny wetness
Where the taxis go,
With people and umbrellas all
Bobbing to and fro.

Rain in the city!
I love to hear it drip
When I am cosy in my room
Snug as any ship,
With toys spread on the table,
With a picture book or two,
And the rain like a rumbling tune that sings
Through everything I do.

AT THE THEATER

The sun was bright when we went in,
But night and lights were there,
The walls had golden trimming on
And plush on every chair.

The people talked; the music played,
Then it grew black as pitch,
Yes, black as closets full of clothes,
Or caves, I don't know which.

The curtain rolled itself away,
It went I don't know where,
But, oh, that country just beyond,
I do wish we lived there!

The mountain peaks more jaggéd rise,
  Grass grows more green than here;
The people there have redder cheeks,
  And clothes more gay and queer.

They laugh and smile, but not the same,
  Exactly, as we do,
And if they ever have to cry
  Their tears are different too—

More shiny, somehow, and more sad,
  You hold your breath to see
If everything will come out right
  And they'll live happily;

If Pierrot will kiss Pierrette
  Beneath an orange moon,
And Harlequin and Columbine
  Outwit old Pantaloon.

You know they will, they always do,
  But still your heart must beat,
And you must pray they will be saved,
  And tremble in your seat.

And then it's over and they bow
  All edged about with light,
The curtain rattles down and shuts
  Them every one from sight.

It's strange to find the afternoon
  Still bright outside the door,
And all the people hurrying by
  The way they were before!

THE STAY-ASHORES

The sheets hung out on the roof to dry
Billow and flap to the morning sky
As if they thought that they might be
The sails of little ships at sea.
Atop the walls of stone and brick,
With chimneypots all round them thick,
They tug and stretch at their lines and strain
Till someone carries them down again.
Poor old sheets, it's hard on you,
Never to sail the windy blue!

WHAT? NO MORE WITCHES IN NEW YORK?

WHAT? No more witches in New York—
When every night the sky
With flaming signs is crowded thick,
When letters eight feet high
Are scribbled clear against the dark;
When cats all made of light
In endless silken balls are caught;
When fountains fill the night
With colored splashings falling down
To fade before they go,
And bottles that pour on and on
Yet never empty grow.
When lighted cars in strings go by
Like dragons everywhere,
And music out of nowhere sounds
All up and down the air?
It's Magic, plain as plain can be,
And any one who'll say
There are no witches in New York—
Has never seen Broadway!

SKYSCRAPERS

Do Skyscrapers ever grow tired
  Of holding themselves up high?
Do they ever shiver on frosty nights
  With their tops against the sky?
Do they feel lonely sometimes,
  Because they have grown so tall?
Do they ever wish they could lie right down
  And never get up at all?

CHESTNUT STANDS

Oh, every fall the chestnut men
  Are out by park and street,
Frosty mornings, sunny noons,
  And nights of stars or sleet.

Little stands at every curb,
  Charcoal fires that glow,
And like a spell that sharp, strange smell
  Wherever feet may go.

Smoky bitterness of leaves
  Burning who knows where?
Spicy scent of frost-nipped fruit
  Tingling on the air.

Town-dull folk might never guess,
  Or country hearts recall,
If chestnut men forgot to come
  To cities in the fall.

STORES AND STOREKEEPERS

THE FLORIST SHOP

Florist shops are beautiful,
All damply green and dimly cool,
And the men who keep them are sure to be
A little baggy about the knee,
With voices pleasant and rather low
From living along with things that grow;
For you can't stay noisy and hurried where
Petal on petal fills the air
With spiciness, and every tree
Is hung with gayest greenery.
Grocers bustle and butchers shout,
Tradesmen tramp noisily in and out,
But florists are quiet men and kind,
With a sort of fragrance of the mind.

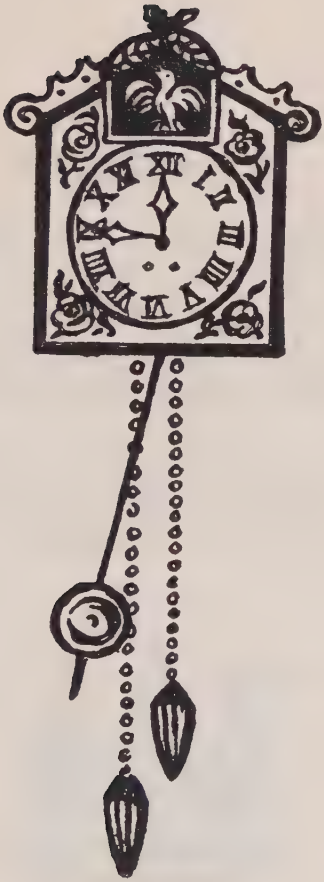
GENERAL STORE

SOMEDAY I'm going to have a store
With a tinkly bell hung over the door,
With real glass cases and counters wide
And drawers all spilly with things inside.
There'll be a little of everything:
Bolts of calico; balls of string;
Jars of peppermint; tins of tea;
Pots and kettles and crockery;
Seeds in packets; scissors bright;
Kegs of sugar, brown and white;
Sarsaparilla for picnic lunches,
Bananas and rubber boots in bunches.
I'll fix the window and dust each shelf,
And take the money in all myself,
It will be my store and I will say:
"What can I do for you to-day?"

FLOU

THE CUCKOO-CLOCK SHOP

You can't see Time,
  But if you go
To the Cuckoo-clock Shop
  In the old brick row,
Where a kindly gentleman
  Bends all day
With a glass to his eye
  And springs in a tray;
Where carved clocks hang
  All clustered thick,
You'll hear Time pass—
  For click, click, click,
Each wee brown door
  Will open wide
And the Cuckoo Bird
  That lives inside
Will poke out his head
  And say, "*Cuckoo!*"
As often as Time
  Has told him to!



THE TOY SHOP

Oh, the pleasantest place is Toy Village,
Where the roofs show red between
The pyramid trees with their marvelous birds
And foliage of bright, true green.
There the pink sheep bleat and the brown cows graze
And every lad has his lass,
For the people there, they come by the pair,
A-sprinkled all over the grass!

AT THE BANK

All that I can ever see
Even when I stand
On my toes, and stretch and peer,
Is a man's plump hand
And his face through the bars as he talks to mother—
And then, first thing I know,
Her purse is full of money and
It's time for us to go.

Oh, when shall I be tall enough
Beyond that shelf to see
The piles of bills as green and thick
As leaves upon a tree,
The crocks of gold all running over,
New silver by the pound,
And pennies heaped like jewels in
The cave Aladdin found?

THE COBBLER'S

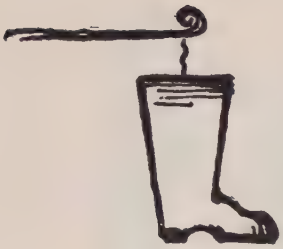
Shoes on counter, bench and shelf;
  Shoes heaped on the floor—
And a golden giant's boot that swings
  Above the Cobbler's door.

Stubby toes and run-down heels;
  Leather soles worn thin;
Shoes so cracked and shiny that
  They positively grin.

Muddy shoes like tired tramps;
  Dancing slippers new—
Cobbler, as you mend them all,
  Do they talk to you?

Do they tell you what they've seen
  On the roads they know?
Do they say what sort of folk
  Take them to and fro?

Are they glad to rest themselves
  In your shop awhile,
Or are they eager to be off
  Mile after mile?



Does the golden boot outside,
Hanging by itself,
Wish it were a plain, patched shoe,
Cobbler, on your shelf?

PUSHCART ROW

In rain or shine; in neat or snow;
The pushcarts stretch in a long green row,
Close to the curb as they can crowd,
With men all shouting their wares aloud.
If you have need of a lettuce head,
Or a bunch of radishes shiny red,
Of onions, carrots, or cauliflower,
Oranges sweet or lemons sour,
Polished apples or dripping greens,
Fat little mushrooms, thin string beans.
Of fruits and berries plump and round,
By the basket, by the pound—
Bring out your purse and take your pick
Where the two-wheeled pushcarts cluster thick;
Where dogs and children play about
Wheels and pavement and gutter-spout;
Where the women wear shawls and earrings gold
And the men are mostly brown and old
With selling their wares in shine or snow
On the cobblestones of Pushcart Row.

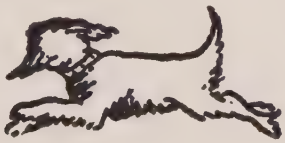
THE ANIMAL STORE

If I had a hundred dollars to spend,
Or maybe a little more,
I'd hurry as fast as my legs would go
Straight to the animal store.

I wouldn't say, "How much for this or that?"—
"What kind of a dog is he?"
I'd buy as many as rolled an eye,
Or wagged a tail at me!

I'd take the hound with the drooping ears
That sits by himself alone;
Cockers and Cairns and wobbly pups
For to be my very own.

I might buy a parrot all red and green,
And the monkey I saw before,
If I had a hundred dollars to spend,
Or maybe a little more.



SALTY DAYS

OLD CAPTAINS

Old captains are best, especially
When their eyes are blue and keen;
Trimmed round with lines, and twinkly
With all the sights they've seen.

They know the sea as if it were
A lady of changeful ways,
And they're not ashamed to humor her
And serve her all their days.

I'D LIKE TO BE A LIGHTHOUSE

I'd like to be a lighthouse
All scrubbed and painted white.
I'd like to be a lighthouse
And stay awake all night
To keep my eye on everything
That sails my patch of sea;
I'd like to be a lighthouse
With the ships all watching me.

THE OLD WHARVES

I'm sorry for the old wharves
  Because they have to stand
With the sea all round their wooden knees
  And never run to land
If they grow tired. They have to stay
In their places night and day.

Tilted backwards, gray and worn
  From salty tides that flow
Dark green at high-water mark,
  Weedy-brown at low—
It never stops surprising me
How they can stand so patiently!

TIDES

The tide is high! The tide is high!
The shiny waves go marching by
Past ledge and shallow and weedy reach
Up the long gray lengths of shingle beach;
Like an army storming height on height
With green-blue armor and banners white
On, on they charge to the farthest line
Of scattered seaweed brown and fine—
So far, then, grumbling, back creep they,
And the tide has turned for another day.

The tide is low! The tide is low!
Weed-decked and gaunt the ledges show
With mussel shells in blues and blacks
And barnacles along their backs.
Now kelp shines like mahogany
And every rock pool brims with sea
To make a little looking glass
For sky and clouds and birds that pass.

OLD MAN SCHOONER

Old Man Schooner, where have you been?
  Where will you go from here?
What harbors strange have you anchored in?
  To what far port do you steer?

Was your topsail patched in Zanzibar?
  Your cargo stowed in Spain?
Did the spray of the four seas drench your decks
  In a stinging, salty rain?

Have your masthead lanterns dimmed to specks
  In the flare of the Northern Lights?
Or strewn the water with trails of gold
  Through the calm of tropic nights?

What storms has your old green hull plowed
    through?
  Under what shifting skies
Have you grown so battered and gaunt and gray,
  So salty and weatherwise?

Oh, smacks are steady, and yachts are swift,
  And sloops are white and new,
But there's never a ship so fine to see,
  Old Man Schooner, as you!

CAPTAIN ENOCH

CAPTAIN ENOCH is small and spare
With a back that "cants to lea";
His face is wrinkled, but not from care—
It's spending his days at sea,

Along with winds and tides and rain;
Tarred rope and salty spray;
Mast and canvas and anchor chain,
Till he's battered and brown as they.

There's not a port he doesn't know,
From Iceland to Bombay,
And he talks of them when we're out for a row
In the most familiar way.

He says how China's a trifle hot;
  And the folks are queer in Spain,
And he never met with any spot
  That could beat the State o' Maine.

Those others, he says, may be all right
  If they happen to suit your whim,
But Herring Harbor and Seal Ledge Light
  Are good enough for him!

It's here he means to end his days,
  Where he was a boy like me,
With the hills and islands and waterways
  The same as they used to be.

OLD MAN CUTTER

Old Man Cutter lives down by the shore
With lobster traps piled round his door.
Little, lop-sided, and gray as he
His house sits close as it can to the sea.
Queer as to chimney, minus a shutter,
You'd know it belonged to Old Man Cutter,
Just as the patched place in his coat
Matches the patch on the sail of his boat!

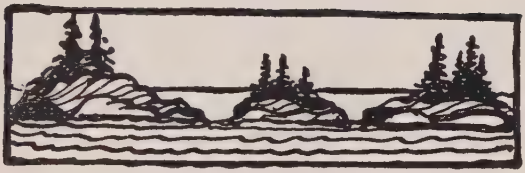
CAPTAIN JIM

THERE's not a man along the wharves
So brown as Captain Jim,
Or half so spry, or blue of eye—
I'm going to be like him
Some day—and have hip rubber boots,
And pictures in tattoo
On arms and chest, and sit with the rest
Of the men on the wharves, and chew.

FOG

Fog is over the mountain-tops,
  Fog's along the shore;
It creeps in silence from tree to tree,
  And close to every door.

And this is all we may know of it,
  This much and nothing more—
No Fog was ever so chill and white
  Or half so strange before.



ESPECIALLY ISLANDS

ISLANDS

All the islands have run away
From the land which is their mother;
Out where the lighthouse guards the bay
They race with one another.

Rocky or wooded, humped and small,
Edged whitely round with spray,
What should we do if the islands all
Ran back to land some day?

How would the ships know where to steer?
Where would the sea gulls fly?
How flat the sea would look, and queer,
How lonely under the sky!

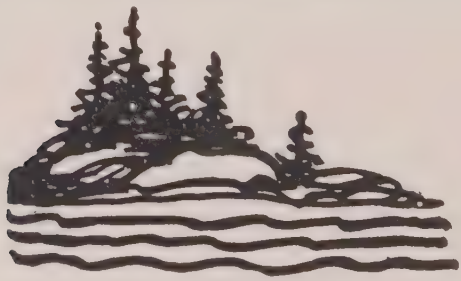
IF ONCE YOU HAVE SLEPT ON AN ISLAND

If once you have slept on an island
  You'll never be quite the same;
You may look as you looked the day before
  And go by the same old name,

You may bustle about in street and shop;
  You may sit at home and sew,
But you'll see blue water and wheeling gulls
  Wherever your feet may go.

You may chat with the neighbors of this and that
  And close to your fire keep,
But you'll hear ship whistle and lighthouse bell
  And tides beat through your sleep.

Oh, you won't know why, and you can't say how
  Such change upon you came,
But—once you have slept on an island
  You'll never be quite the same!



THE GRASS ISLAND

The little grass island I call my own,
For it all belongs to me,
It lies in the place where four roads meet,
With a signpost for a tree.

Nobody needs it to build a house,
It's far too small, you see,
But there's room for daisies and blue-eyed grass
And plenty of room for me.

The cars flash by and the hay carts pass
Like ships on a long brown sea,
And the folk aboard them smile and nod
And wave their hands to me.

SONG FOR A PASTURE

THERE's a little island pasture that
I know, know, know,
Where roses, fern, and bayberry
All grow, grow, grow;
Where daisies shine, and clover clumps
Are red, red, red,
And every bright blue harebell nods
Its head, head, head;
Where devil's-paint-brush glows like fire
In the grass, grass, grass,
And all the birds go singing as
They pass, pass, pass.
Oh, it's there I'd like to live with flowers
Round my door, door, door,
And never leave that pasture
Any more, more, more!

THIS IS THE PLACE

This is the place where hills loom far,
Where the scattered farms and islands are,
And all the marching trees;

Where fields lie sunny and roads twist brown;
Where the wharves are listing and tumble-down
With salt tides round their knees.

This is the place where orchard boughs
Are seaward crooked, and from each square house
Wood-smoke climbs the skies;

Where old farm wagons are painted blue,
Where every sail has a patch or two,
And the windows shine like eyes.

MISS LUCINDA'S GARDEN

Larkspur and lupin burn blue in the garden
  By Miss Lucinda's door,
Clove pinks are sweet and roses bloom
  Though she's been dead for more
Years than I'm old, I heard them say
Down in the village yesterday.

Tall yellow lilies crowd the path
  So thick you could not pass,
And one red poppy, like a tongue
  Of fire, shines in the grass.
It's strange that they should be so gay
With Miss Lucinda gone away.

SUNDAY

Along this road the fir trees grow,
Slender and tall in a long green row,
With their topmost tips all lifted high
Like solemn fingers that point to the sky,
And the little white church that tops the hill
Points with its steeple higher still.

TAKING ROOT

If I should sit the summer through
And never move or stir,
Could I take root on this pasture slope
With the bay and juniper?

Would thrushes build their nests in my hair?
Would my lap be sweet with rose?
Would berries twine me and harebell flowers
Spring blue between my toes?

THE CRANBERRY POOL

In the Pool at Cranberry,
Not a root or pointed tree,
Rocking dory, humped blue hill
But is doubled in the still
Unstirred water, clear as glass
With its fringe of bright green grass
Where the long-legged herons stare
At their dark shapes mirrored there,
And each sea gull sits at rest
On its white reflected breast.

BIRDS AND BEASTS

THE CATBIRD

Orchard, meadow and garden through
  You follow me with your cry—
Half a bird-call, half a mew.
  What makes you tease me? Why?
Whether I listen or notice you
  I know your bright black eye
Is watching me the branches through,
  Why do you watch me? Why?
Who laugh at the curious things I do,
  You cannot sing or fly,
Balance myself upon the blue,
  Or climb the heights of sky,
And it isn't at all polite of you,
  Catbird, but don't deny
You think I'm stupid. Yes, you do!
  Well, Catbird, so do I!

THE PEABODY BIRD

Peabody! Peabody! Peabody!
Why do you call that name
Over and over and over?
Is it a sort of game
That you play by yourself
The whole day through?
Is it someone you want?
I wish I knew.

Peabody! Peabody! Peabody!
From fir top or leafy spray,
It's a long name and a queer name
For a bird like you to say.
Can't you forget for a single hour?
They are either lost or dead.
Couldn't you look for someone else?
And wouldn't I do instead?

PARROTS

Whenever a parrot looks at me,
I feel all strange and shivery,
For, oh, a parrot's bead-bright eyes
Are keen as wizard's and as wise,
And when they turn and stare at you,
You feel as if they somehow knew
The things you keep all tucked away
Inside yourself and never say.
They stare and shine, and shine and stare,
And you must stand before them there
And feel there's nothing in your mind
A wise old parrot couldn't find.

THE CHINA DOG

He lives by himself in a shelf in our hall,
But he never barks when people call;
He never teases for cake at tea,
Or wags his tail at sight of me,
Stiffly it curls about his back,
Where the spots are painted brown and black.
He has a sad, unblinking eye
And I always pat him when I go by.

If I knew the magic words to say
He would leave that shelf this very day!
He'd not be a china dog at all,
Solemn and stiff against a wall,
But he'd bark and follow me everywhere
And nip my fingers and lick my hair,
While every single night he'd be
Snuggled up warm in bed with me!

THE TREE TOADS

Down by the old swamp road
The Tree Toads are quarreling
With cracked, insistent voices.
They have crept out to squat
By their little rooty doorways,
Under their lichen eaves,
For their nightly arguments
About the world in general—
And Tree Toads in particular.

Sacred to
the Memoyes
Jonathan
Preble
Aged 3 years

THE LAMB

"*Jonathan Preble, agéd three,*"
Has a lamb for company,
Carved of marble smooth and white
Lest he should be afraid at night
Or lonely by himself all day
Among the other tombstones gray;
So weatherworn they are and old,
To read them, you must scrape the mold
And lichens from the folded wings,
The carved scrolls, crowns, and harps with strings.
Other sheep and lambs may pass,
Nibbling in the dewy grass;
Tinkling bells call, "Come away
Where pasture slopes are sweet with bay,
And soft with tender greenery
In the fields above the sea."
If he hears, he does not show
Whether he would like to go.
Solemn, stiff, and very small,
Winter, summer, spring, and fall,
He stays, lest it should lonely be
For "*Jonathan Preble, agéd three.*"

THE DANCING BEAR

Slowly he turns himself round and round,
  Lifting his paws with care,
Twisting his head in a sort of bow
  To the people watching there.

His keeper, grinding a wheezy tune,
  Jerks at the iron chain,
And the dusty, patient bear goes through
  His solemn tricks again.

Only his eyes are still and fixed
  In a wide, bewildered stare,
More like a child's lost in woods at night
  Than the eyes of a big brown bear.

BERRIES AND BRANCHES

WOOD-STRAWBERRIES

I WENT to the wood where the strawberries grow,
And picked till my hands were red.
The grass was cool and the sun came warm
Through the branches overhead.

Berry to berry beckoned me,
Pointed and wild and sweet;
It seemed there was nothing to do at all
But fill my hands and eat.

Nothing but greenness under foot,
Greenery overhead,
And jewel-bright under their scalloped leaves
Wild wood-strawberries red.

WHITE BIRCHES

Over the meadows
  The Birchtrees gay,
Like thin, white girls
  On a holiday
Stand tip-toe all
  In their leaf-green dresses
While each to the other
  Bends and presses,
As if they whispered
  Secrets shy
About the people
  Passing by.

CHECKERBERRIES

Checkerberries, people call them,
But they're not berries at all.
They are fairy apples, ripe
In June instead of Fall.

We must stoop to find them
Red about our feet,
But fairy hands reach high to pick
The fruit that dangles sweet.

WOODS

WHENEVER the woods I walk among
Are very green and very young,
With leaves a-twinkle on every tree,
The heart begins to dance in me,
And my feet to caper from tree to tree
Over the sun-patched greenery.

But when the woods I walk among
Are very old, with mosses hung
In thin festoons of tattered gray,
And the green seems high and far away,
Oh, then I tiptoe from tree to tree,
For a hush is on the heart of me.

THE MUSHROOM GATHERERS

Into the woods behind the farm
Where the yellow mushrooms grow,
Each with a basket on an arm,
Into the woods we'll go.
Lightly our feet will carry us there
Past thicket and fallen tree,
Till we come to the sun-patched clearing where
Grows that golden company.
We shall find them wherever our eyes may look —
Scattered or in a ring;
In mossy hollow; in rooty nook
And the fir boughs' sheltering.
Spicy and plump and strangely cold,
We'll gather them where they grow,
And when each basket brims with gold,
Home through the woods we'll go.

VEGETABLES

A CARROT has a green fringed top;
  A beet is royal red;
And lettuces are curious
  All curled and run to head.

Some beans have strings to tie them on,
  And, what is still more queer,
Ripe corn is nothing more or less
  Than one enormous ear!

But when potatoes all have eyes,
  Why is it they should be
Put in the ground and covered up—
  Where it's too dark to see?

BLUE FLOWERS

Violets in April,
Forget-me-nots in May,
Larkspur in the month of June
To make your gardens gay!
Blue-eyed grasses in the fields
Of sunny-houred July;
August with her harebell hosts,
Blue as sea and sky,
But just before the frost,
And bluest of them all,
Like fairy banners, gentians spread
Their fringes to the fall.

FRINGES OF FAIRYLAND

THE VISITOR

FEATHER-FOOTED and swift as a mouse
An elfin gentleman came to our house;
Knocked his wee brown knuckles upon our door;
Bowed till his peaked cap swept the floor.
His shiny eyes blinked bright at me
As he asked for bread and a sup of tea,

"And plenty of honey, please," he said,
"For I'm fond of honey on my bread!"
Cross-legged he sat, with never a word,
But the old black kettle sang like a bird;
The red geranium burst in bloom
With the blaze of firelight in the room,
The china rattled on every shelf,
And the broom danced merrily all by itself.
Quick to the pantry then I ran
For to serve that elfin gentleman.
I brewed him tea, I brought him bread
With clover honey thickly spread.
One sip he took, one Elfin bite,
But his ears they twitched with sheer delight.
He smacked his lips and he smiled at me.
"May good luck follow you, child!" said he.
He circled me round like a gay green flame
Before he was off the way he came,

Leaving me there in the kitchen dim,
Sighing and staring after him,
With the fire low and the tea grown cold,
And the moon through the window sharp and old,
Only before me—instead of honey,
That bread was golden with thick-spread money!

THE SECRET LAND

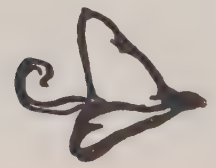
WHERE the tallest tree trunks stand,
I found a green and russet land
Of criss-cross root and toadstool tree
And vines that twisted cunningly
Round sunken doors to hidden halls.
There thinnest threads of waterfalls
Forever let their brightness pass
In silver showers on the grass.
I listened—but all else I heard
Were nibbling mouse and twit'ring bird
And laughter light as air.
If feet had passed that way, they made
No print on moss, nor bent one blade
Of all that green; yet I could see
The shine of small eyes watching me
With still, unblinking stare.

TOADSTOOL TOWN

At the edge of the old fir wood
From the tufted green and brown
Of moss and fern—have you seen them rise—
The spires of Toadstool Town?
Have you watched the faint smoke mount
From those pointed roofs and gay?
Have you marked how they clustered peak on peak—
And found them gone next day?

RED-CAPPED MOSS

What Elf has left his cap behind?
  Has he found out his loss?
And will he come some night to find
  It growing to the moss?



ELVES AND APPLE TREES

Elves love best of all to run
Through old orchards in the sun,
By gnarled and twisted apple trees
With crooked arms and knobbly knees,
With roots like humps, and leaves like hair,
And twigs that clutch and claw the air.
They help to hang the blossoms out
And in the fall, oh, never doubt
When apples shine above your head
It was some Elf who made them red!

THE ELF TREE

WHENEVER I pass a gnarly tree,
I knock my knuckles three times three,
My heart beats fast in case it should
Be the right tree in all that wood—
The one where the elves and fairies hide,
With their pots of gold piled high inside:
Where their firefly lanterns swing by day,
And new elf jackets, green and gay,
Are hung in tidy rows and neat,
By curly shoes for elfin feet.
Sometime I'll know I've found it, for
Out will spring a little door,
An elf in a pointed cap will peer
And call me in for seven long year!

THE GREEN FIDDLER

As I came over the humpbacked hill
  Where the trees crowd thick and black,
I met a little old man in green
  With fiddle strapped on back.

His cap rose tall as an Elfin steeple,
  His eyes shone water clear,
He bowed him low to see me go
  And he said to me, "My dear,

"It's not for silver I'm asking you,
  For shelter or meat or bread,
But pluck me four of your golden hairs,
  Four bright gold hairs," he said.

"It's a little thing to ask," thought I.
"You're welcome enough to mine."
On the wood road dim, I gave them him.
He smiled to see them shine.

He reached the fiddle from off his back,
He threaded them one by one,
Brighter than golden wire they gleamed,
Finer than silk new spun.

Then swift as shadow the thin bow flew,
His fingers capered gay;
Birds, far and near, grew still to hear
That elfin fiddler play.

And shy wood creatures with still bright gaze
On soundless tread crept near,
The very leaves hung motionless
Above my head to hear.

I could not feel my own heart beat,
The breath died in my throat;
Stock still I stood in the shadowed wood,
Lest I should miss one note.

Twilight came stealing from tree to tree,
The little lights of town
Sprinkled the valley like buttercups,
Or stars turned upside down;

And the farthest one that I knew for mine,
It would not let me stay;
Oh, the tune was sweet, but my town-weighed feet,
They carried me away.

Carried me home to the valley lights,
To the ticking clock on the stair,
To fire and cupboard and table spread
With damask and willow ware.

So I laugh and gossip by candlelight
To the clatter of plate and spoon,
But my cheeks turn hot for a secret spot
And the lilt of a fairy tune.

And wherever I go and whatever I do
Silvery, wild, and shrill,
I am hearing that little old man in green
On the side of the humpbacked hill.

The neighbors may frown and shake their heads
To see me stand and stare.
What should they know of fiddle bow
And strings of golden hair?

Oh, I let them scold and I let them smile,
And whisper of me apart,
For I have a hidden fairy tune
In the bottom of my heart.

THE ELFIN ORGAN-GRINDER

He travels the winding roads of Elfland
And everywhere he goes,
There's a rush of little green hurrying bodies
And the scuffle of curly toes,
Treading the dew-bright grass in circles
To a tune more wild and gay
Than ever thrush or oriole sang
To his mate in the woods of May.

His eyes shine brighter than chips of stars,
  His brown arms never tire,
He takes no coppers, for joy is all
  An elf may ask in hire.
And human children, if they hear
  That organ-grinder play,
Will ever after have feet that dance
  And hearts that are always gay.

REMINISCENCES

REMINISCENCES

These old brown shoes climbed Bubble Mountain;
Sent pebbles flying along the sea;
Sped over pastures; through berry brambles—
That's how the scratches came to be.

The toes were stubbed on the old rock ledges
That rise so red above the bay.
The leather's gone in several places,
I remember the very spot and day.

A crooked spruce root made that dent.
Here's mud that came from Cranberry Lane,
I only have to look at my shoes
To see it all as plain as plain.

They carried me round all summer long,
We were out in rain or shiny weather;
So I keep them safe in my closet where
We can sit and remember old times together.

MEETING

As I went home on the old wood road,
With my basket and lesson book,
A deer came out of the tall trees
And down to drink at the brook.

Twilight was all about us,
Twilight and tree on tree;
I looked straight into its great, strange eyes
And the deer looked back at me.

Beautiful, brown, and unafraid
Those eyes returned my stare,
And something with neither sound nor name
Passed between us there.

Something I shall not forget;
Something still, and shy, and wise,
In the dimness of the woods,
From a pair of gold-flecked eyes.

HAREBELL TIME

Oh, I laid me down in the meadow grass
  Where the hosts of harebell grew,
All in a gallant company
  Of nodding blue on blue.

Gayly the pale blue clappers clashed,
  Yet never a sound they made.
Sweeter than chimes their stillness was
  Or tune on fiddle played.

THE PLAYHOUSE KEY

This is the key to the playhouse
  In the woods by the pebbly shore,
It's winter now; I wonder if
  There's snow about the door?

I wonder if the fir trees tap
  Green fingers on the pane;
If sea gulls cry and the roof is wet
  And tinkle-y with rain?

I wonder if the flower-sprigged cups
  And plates sit on their shelf,
And if my little painted chair
  Is rocking by itself?

CRANBERRY ROAD

I'd like to be walking the Cranberry Road,
Where the sea shines blue through the bristling firs,
And the rocky pastures are overgrown
With bayberry and junipers;
Where orchards of bent old apple trees
Go trooping down to the pebbly shore,
And the clapboard houses are seaward turned,
With larkspur clumps at every door;
Where there's plenty of time to say good-day
When friendly eyes from a window peer.
Oh, I wish I were back on the Cranberry Road
I'd rather be there than here.

WISHING

I STEPPED into a fairy ring
  Upon Midsummer Night.
I crooked my thumbs and held my breath
  That I might wish aright.

The wind blew cool about my hair,
  Beyond the dunes the sea
Beat soft as some far elfin drum,
  And birds chirped fitfully.

The curly-fronded tips of fern
  Close-pressed about my feet;
With weedy salt and rose and bay,
  The air smelt keen and sweet.

Across the water lights shone clear;
  The lighthouse blinked its eye,
While in the dimness of the grass
  The firefly hosts went by.

I thought and thought, but nothing seemed
  So good a thing to wish
As that some other night might be
  As beautiful as this.

A NUMBER OF THINGS

THE KETTLEDRUMS

The horns were gay as a brook in spring;
The fiddles sang in every string;
The viols grumbled; the flutes soared clear,
And the kettledrums were good to hear.

They played no tune but softly under
The rest they boomed their elfin thunder.
Oh, strange, and solemn, and wondrous sweet
To hear their rumblings, beat on beat!

THE WIND

Be very polite to the Wind, my child
For the Wind's a fellow both wise and wild.
A tramp, he travels from town to town
With his bag of tricks like a circus clown.
The chimney pots are his pipes to play,
The sails his dancing partners gay—
He leads them out and away from shore,
Over the sea's blue, polished floor.
He never rests; he never tires;
He blows on grass blades and gilded spires,
On tasseled corn and fields of wheat,
And the skirts of the farmer's wife so neat.
If you chance to meet him, always say,
"Wind, are you feeling well to-day?"
And be sure you lift the cap from your head
Or the Wind may do it himself, instead!

HOUSES

I LIKE old houses best, don't you?
They never go cluttering up a view
With roofs too red and paint too new,
With doors too green and blinds too blue!
The old ones look as if they *grew*,
Their bricks may be dingy, their clapboards
askew
From sitting so many seasons through,
But they've learned in a hundred years or two
Not to go cluttering up a view!

THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE

It's years since a scholar climbed the hill
But the yellow schoolhouse stands there still
In its sunny clearing set between
Rocky pasture and spruce woods green.
On creaking hinges the door swings wide
For any passer to peer inside,
Where the rows of desks and chairs stretch brown,
And poets with beards look kindly down
From the walls they share with maps hung thick,
And a clock that's forgotten how to tick
In all the years since school let out,
And the last child ran with whoop and shout
Into the still, bright afternoon
Of such another day in June.

RED LEAF

Red Leaf! Red Leaf!
What tree did you grow on—
The cut-leaf maple
In our backyard?
The twisted dwarf
In the upper pasture?
Or the flaming beauty
Beside the swamp?

What does it matter,
Child, where I grew—
By swamp or pasture
Or square-walled yard?
Frail craft of fire
Freed to the blue,
The wind shall carry me
Where, oh, where?

THE OLD COACH ROAD

THERE's hardly a wheel rut left to show
The way the coach road used to go.
Trees straddle it and berries grow
Where coaches rumbled long ago,
And horses' hoofs struck sparks of light,
Many a frosty winter night.
Here gypsy faces, lean and tan,
Peered from some lumbering caravan,
Or peddlers passed with bulging packs
And sheep with sun aslant their backs.
Now, only berry pickers push
Their way through thorn and elder bush—
But sometimes of a night, they say,
Wheels have been heard to pass that way.

BAREFOOT DAYS

In the morning, very early,
  That's the time I love to go
Barefoot where the fern grows curly
  And grass is cool between each toe,
    On a summer morning-O!
    On a summer morning!

That is when the birds go by
  Up the sunny slopes of air,
And each rose has a butterfly
  Or a golden bee to wear;
And I am glad in every toe—
    Such a summer morning-O!
    Such a summer morning!

SEPTEMBER

Now the unseen crickets sing
  Frosty dawn to chill twilight,
Sing and sing and sing and sing,
  Everywhere, with all their might:
Just as if they thought that they
Could sing the very cold away.

OLD GYPSIES

Over the sky's dark roads,
The caravan moon moves slow,
And all the hosts of stars
Forever restless go;
Unwearied gypsy companies
Traveling the centuries.